communications network along respective connection paths established therefor, the connection paths each traversing the network entity via network entity interfaces provided with the network entity through which said connections are routed, the method comprising the steps of:

(a)   associating a priority indicator with each of the connections, the priority indicator being selected from a priority hierarchy comprised of a plurality of priority levels which varies from highest priority to lowest priority; and

(b) upon detection of a signaling connection which is associated with a number of connections, releasing every connection of said number of connections which said network outage has disrupted, wherein said release takes place at the network entity in a sequence which corresponds to the priority hierarchy from the connection associated with the highest priority level to the connection associated with the lowest priority level.

2(Amended).   The method according to Claim 1, wherein the step of releasing the connections comprises the steps of:

compiling, upon detection of said signaling connection, an ordered release list comprising every connection of said number of connections;

releasing the connections in the ordered release list in a sequence which corresponds to the priority hierarchy from the connection associated with the highest priority level to the connection associated with the lowest priority level.

7(Amended).   The method according to Claim 6, wherein said signaling link is for communicating administrative information concerning operation of said number of connections.

9(Amended).   The method according to Claim 7 , wherein the signaling communications network is an ATM communications network.

23(Amended). An apparatus for the ordered release of connections in a signaling communications network, the connections being routed across a network entity in the communications network along respective connection paths therefor, the connection paths

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each traversing the network entity via network entity interfaces provided with the network entity and through which said connections are routed, the apparatus comprising:

(a)   means for storing a priority indicator associated with each of the connections, the priority indicator being selected from a priority hierarchy which varies from highest priority to lowest priority; and

(b)   means for directing the release of every connection of a number of connections in the event that failure of a signaling connection associated with said number of connections is indicated to the apparatus, said release of said number of connections being directed in a sequence corresponding to the priority hierarchy from the connection associated in the storing means with the highest priority level to the connection associated in the storing means with the lowest priority level.

26(Amended). The apparatus according to Claim 25, wherein the directing means comprises means for compiling an ordered release list in the memory upon indication of said failure of said signaling connection to the apparatus, the compiling means enumerating in the ordered release list every connection of said number of connections in order from the connection associated with the highest priority level to the connection associated with the lowest priority level.

29(Amended). The apparatus according to Claim 28, wherein said signalling link is for communicating administrative information concerning operation of said number of connections.

31(Amended). The apparatus according to any one of Claim 29, wherein the signalling communications network is an ATM communications network.

32(Amended). The apparatus according to Claim 26, wherein each connection is associated in said look-up table with a traffic rate, and the compiling means lists connections associated with a common level of priority in the release list in a sequence corresponding to the traffic rates of the connections.

A marked up version of the amendments is submitted herewith.

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